



Homeland
Security

PRESS RELEASE

April 25, 2006

Contact: 202-282-8010

DHS IMPLEMENTS IMMEDIATE MEASURES TO SECURE ACCESS TO PORTS

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) today announced it is taking significant steps quickly to enhance security by checking the backgrounds of port workers.

DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff announced that the Department will begin conducting name-based background checks on up to 400,000 port workers within the United States. These checks will be an initial measure while the Department also expedites the rollout of a comprehensive nationwide biometric-based Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) in 2006.

“It is fundamental that individuals who pose a security threat do not gain access to our nation’s ports,” stated DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff. “The name-based checks will provide an immediate security boost while we simultaneously complete the work to implement a secure national transportation worker credential.”

The preliminary name checks will be completed by the summer of 2006 and will initially be required for longshoremen and maritime employees of facility owners and operators. Ultimately all individuals will require a TWIC in order to be eligible for unescorted access to secure areas.

Basic identifying information will be collected by the U.S. Coast Guard during the name-based checks. This information will allow the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to vet workers against terrorist watch lists through the Terrorist Screening Center. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will ensure workers are legally eligible to work in the United States. Though biometric information will not be collected during the initial name checks, it will be a key piece of identity verification for the TWIC.

The initial name check will not include the full criminal records check that will be a part of the TWIC program. However, the review will be a crucial first step to ensuring those individuals who work at our ports are not a security threat.

During the past few weeks, TSA has taken preliminary steps to identify a contractor to assist with the enrollment of TWIC. Secretary Chertoff made clear that the next step in the process, publication of a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, is imminent and will provide further details on TWIC.

TSA laid the foundation for the establishment of the universal credential through a technology evaluation and prototype test. During the prototype test of the credential last year, TSA issued more than 4,000 TWICs to workers at 26 sites in six states.

###